

Women's centre suffers

Dalhousie in Contradiction

Dalhousie's involvement in its surrounding communities is sadly lacking.

The results of a survey conducted by President Howard Clark revealed that the majority of local community groups felt that they were ignored by the university and that Dalhousie just didn't care about them. The results of this small-scale survey may not be statistically accurate, as Clarke admits, but it is certainly an indication of a problem which needs attention.

The administrators of Henson College, the university affiliate for community relations, and Clark have recently made a commitment to increase Dalhousie's involvement in the community, at least on paper. A committee for community access was recently formed. These are all commendable actions, but during this time of a supposed increase in community access, why is the only community women's centre in Halifax being given the boot from the Dal campus?

Patchwork Community Women's Resource Centre must vacate their space in Henson College by January 1 and as yet have nowhere to relocate.

The women's centre has struggled in an attempt to bridge the gap between university women and women from other communities. For that reason, it has had considerable difficulty finding support. The university didn't want to help because Patchwork called itself a community group, and outside support was refused on the grounds that they were located on campus and so should get support from the university.

Bridging the gap between the university and the community is an ambitious ideal for a women's group just starting out, but the university and Henson College, whose job it is to increase community access, should be lending support to keep groups like Patchwork alive.

Increased community access benefits Dalhousie as it does those communities involved. Right now, Dalhousie is a large insular institution, alienated from the rest of the world. Recent emphasis on community access and involvement by Clark and Henson College is a positive step. Another step in that direction would be to ensure the survival of Patchwork women's centre.

by Ellen Reynolds

WHAT WE CAN'T
DO ALONE
WE CAN DO
TOGETHER



l e t t e r s

One million apologies to Beth Ryan (CUP), for forgetting your byline on the Billy Bragg feature last week.

Truro town council protested

We, the undersigned, write to strongly protest the decision of the Truro Town Council, legitimated by the director of the Cobequid Health Unit, to bring into the Truro water system on September 9th two wells which are contaminated by the industrial chemical known as Perchloroethylene (PCE) or Tetrachloroethylene (TCE). We also strongly protest the lack of any public meetings to discuss the issue, where all sides can be heard, before the contaminated wells were opened up.

PCE is not known to occur as a natural product and was first prepared as a chemical in 1821. It has come into widespread industrial use in the twentieth century. PCE has been detected in effluents from textile plants. It is used extensively in textile plants, dry cleaning businesses, and industrial metal cleaning. The director of the Health Unit minimizes the dangers from this industrial chemical. He is reported as stating, in the *Truro Daily News* of Sept. 9th, 1987, "there is no evidence that the chemical is a hazard to expectant mothers or infants. He said his suggestion they not drink the water is purely precautionary."

This chemical has been known to be in the Truro water supply since late 1983. Back in 1984, Dr. MacLean, the then director of the Cobequid Health Unit, was reported, in a *Chronicle Herald* story of Feb. 8th of that year, to have said, "there is reasonable evidence to suggest it is a potential human carcinogen." We therefore ask the present director, why is he now minimizing the danger of PCE? Also, the same story which quoted MacLean gave the Truro Fire Hall well as having between 40 and 50 parts per billion of

PCE. Today, the same well is reported to have between 15 and 18 parts per billion of PCE. Can we believe this latest figure?

We also ask the town council, why have you done nothing about this problem of contaminated drinking wells, which you have known about since 1983? What was wrong with drilling new wells? The Town council's solution to the water shortage problem is one that benefits the industrial users in the town (who do not have to shut down) but seriously compromises the health of the population.

Some health facts that we have looked up:

PCE is a known cancer-causing chemical. The internationally-known epidemiologist Dr. Samuel Epstein, in his book *The Politics of Cancer*, states, "do not use any products containing carbon tetrachloride, trichloroethylene, perchlorethylene, or benzene, which are all carcinogenic."

PCE is a strong narcotic. Short-term exposure to PCE can irritate eyes, nose and throat. Inhalation can cause lung edema. Such exposure also causes nausea, headache, weakness, abdominal pain, constipation, dizziness and incoordination. Because the defatting

action on skin, PCE can also lead to dermatitis. A report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a part of the World Health Organization, gives evidence that PCE causes a high incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma — liver cancer — or laboratory mice. Also, a study of a deceased laundry and dry-cleaning worker showed an excess of lung, cervical, and skin cancers, as well as leukaemias and liver cancers. PCE was one of three dry cleaning chemicals involved in this study.

Thus, given the above health facts, it is not true that there is a "lack of proven risk" to consumers of PCE, as stated in a "notice to water users" from the Truro Town Council, as published in the local media.

Much is being made by the present director of the Cobequid Health Unit and others that the water from the contaminated wells, when mixed with other water, will be "safe" and below the World Health Organization guideline of 10 parts per billion. Yet people like Dr. Epstein, who have no stake in defending the status quo, state: "There is no known method for measuring or predicting a 'safe' level of exposure to any carcinogen below which

cancer will not result in any individual or population group." (Epstein's emphasis.)

In conclusion, the drinking water and groundwater situation in Truro is deteriorating, upon a combined input of industrial and human excrements, and essentially nothing is being done about it. In terms of industrial chemicals like PCE, it is the position of the undersigned that no chemical which cannot be disposed of harmlessly or recycled should be sold or manufactured. This might mean the elimination of certain industrial processes and the consequent changes in personal life styles that this would entail. Town Council is asking the people of Truro to adjust or adapt to a chemically contaminated environment, no matter what the potential human cost. What use is a job without your health? Shut down the contaminated wells and keep them shut down!

- Dorien Freve
- Willis Lunn
- Linda Lunn
- Ruth Kelly
- Muchael Fahey
- Helga Hoffman
- David Orton
- Garry Gillam
- Daphne Cragg